Words from Producer on the Game BIO HAZARD

BIO HAZARD ~ THE GAME

Producer

SHINJI MIKAMI

crimson head elder translation

THE BIRTH OF HORROR FOR ENTERTAINMENT

I was initialy surprised when the Biohazad development team told me that they wanted to make a horror genre game, based on the original NES game 'Sweet Home'. At that time I had no background, or experiance with such a genre, so my reaction was not too enthusiastic.

Up untill then, whilst I had always had a generic idea of how to create a video game, this horror dynamic, a 'game of terror', was something very new, of which I had no prior experiance.

My immediate goal would always be to produce something that sells more than a million copies (I admit my motives were not very honorable). However, after consultation, I began to appreciate that the horror genre was a very rich one, with much to develop upon.

Capcom were not obsessed with selling thousands of copies of this new game, with the focus being on quality, rather than quantity I.e 'a game worthwhile to play from the beginning to the very end'. If we were to sell 150,000 copies for PSX & the same for Saturn, or approx 300,000 copies in total, then that was considered acceptable.

I started to get used to this idea of "a game worthwhile to play from the beginning to the very end" and with this new vision, I became enthused by this project, and my creativity took off.

BIOHAZARD STAFF : It was a noisy affair, with much complaint from within the team, but nothing changes !

WAAAA.......!
Let's get to work
It's too noisy!
YESSIR!

Sweet Home had a very ambitious game system. The aim was for the player to replace five key elements to win the game, using various characters. Whilst these people could die during the gameplay, you can still replace their lost items through the production of new ones. However these items may change depending on the process of their creation. It's a really tough game.

The head of development informed me that a member of the staff team had recently died, and this was a great loss.

Consequently, I decided to re-locate nearer to the staff headquarters, and offer additional assistance.

So I moved close to the offices, inorder to reduce the time it was taking me to commute. Furthermore, if one ended up working particularily late through the night, it would not take long to get back home, and sleep a few hours. My rent increased, but I was willing to pay that extra cost to gain additional time.
And that proved to be a great strategy.

A MASTERPIECE CALLED SWEET HOME

Once deciding on my strategy for the game, I began to study Sweet Home in detail. Coincidently, this was the game that my boss was producing, at the time I joined Capcom. Never could I have imagined then that I would one day produce a game based on Sweet Home. Studying the game, I saw it to he solidly built, and was impressed with the amount of planning invested in it. Notwithstading this, I did not want to make a mere clone of the game. Whilst I cetainly wanted to capture the essence of that game, I intended to make a completely new game; my ultimate goal was to make a game that went beyond the limits of previous horror games to the market.
Sweet Home is a game for the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), produced by Capcom, and based on the film Sweet Home, by Itami Juuzou. A great game, which I highly reccommend.

FEAR & POISON

So much for Sweet Home; As for Biohazard, I think its selling point is fear. Whilst Sweet Home was scary, I wanted Biohazard to be terrifying. I wanted to create a spiritual game, with suspense, but I could'nt visualise. If the game was going to be spiritual, then the enemies would be ghosts, defeatable with a magic word, or such like. When these enemies disappeared so too would the suspense. That was not what I wanted. I wanted to create an atmosphere with a constant fear, even for people who do not believe in ghosts.

LEAVE ME BE...
I LOVE IT HERE!
BEER
BEER
BEER

Whilst creating Biohazard I drank too much beer
I worked so hard, I would fall asleep at my desk

149 ZOMBIES

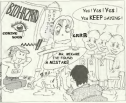
When deliberating on the enemies that I wanted to use I immediately decided upon zombies, without hesitation. In hindsight, perhaps the image of George Romero's zombies left a deep impression on my consciousness, from my high school days.

Imagine a creature, once human, but who now sees other people as mere food. It moves similar to before, but more awkward, and stilted; as it stalks its prey.

The suspense grows from a fear of knowing that you are about to die, and nothing can be done to escape that fate. It is the fear of being eaten alive, not because of who you are, but from being in the wrong place, at the wrong time. To suffer such an experience makes you want to scream "Leave me alone....stay away !"

A HERO WHO FACES HIS FEARS

Experiencing Biohazard is not the same as a horror film, where the protagonist is completely paralyzed by fear. The difference between film & game, is the main character in a game is controlled by the player, holding the character's fate in their hands. I like horror films, but have never had a desire to be a protagonist in one. I wanted to cast the player as a hero, forced to face their fears. Fear induced gameplay that has to be overcome alone. Character design was difficult, as nobody on our team had such previous experience. We would draw, and re-draw, again and again making little progress. I complained, and we got a designer called Oishi to join our team. We worked on the designs together. I made certain the characters had the originality I wanted, and that they remained realistic. Finally, we developed a good design for all characters; with the exception of Jill, whose design was unsatisfactory for what I wanted for Biohazard. We did eventually re-design her to my satisfaction.


BIOHAZARD
COMING SOON
AAAAH!!
Yes! Yes! Yes! You KEEP SAYING!
GRRR
MR. MIKAMI I'VE FOUND A MISTAKE
K
K
K

THE BIOHAZARD ROOM : Here we checked the development process. All eight of us, in just one tiny room... It was crammed.

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A THIRD PERSON PESPECTIVE

At first Biohazard was meant to be a first person game with full polygonal modeling. However, as the game progressed, we became restricted by hardware limitations. It was an obstacle we could not overcome; If we had continued to try, there was a 90% chance the game would just never be completed. Consider that.

The reason I wanted a first person perspective, was to create a very personal sense of fear.

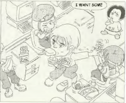
ANYTHING CONSIDERED
SO LONG AS IT SCARES

I still considered it necessary to have a 1st person perspective to achieve that effect. But potentially this could also be accomplished with a 3rd person perspective. I had to find a way to achieve this. I was so focused on that view for the gameplay that I lost the original vision of what I really wanted to achieve.

However by changing to a 3rd person view we would benefit from utilizing pre-rendered backgrounds, whilst employing polygons for enemies & characters. This allowed us to create terrifying environments, whilst leaving more polygons for enemy design. This gave them a greater realism & horror.

From the beginning I wanted this game to be experianced in 1st person because this would allow us to hide the enemies out of sight. Notwithstanding this we also achieved the effect by relying on a particular camera angle, so that the player could not see their immediate surroundings all at once. As the camera angle changed, the suspense grew. Exploring beyond the initial view filled a player with fear. This method worked perfectly. Finally I was satisfied with this 3rd person perspective, to achieve what I wanted.

Everything concluded I gathered together my team to discuss this change. Unfortunately, they were not very enthusiastic. They had already developed & worked on many features that would have to be canned; also they would have a lot of extra work to complete in-order to incorporate this new design. Understandably they did not see the benefits of changing everything to a 3rd person perspective. However, I was confident that they would appreciate my decision once they saw the final result.



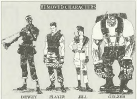
THE FOOD FAIRY. I attended to the team's every need, serving them snacks, and drinks !

IDEAS CHANGE AND DISAPPEAR

THE DISAPPERANCE OF EDDY MURPHY

Our completed game had 5 characters Chris, Jill, Rebecca, Barry and Wesker. However, originally there were 2 characters that did not make the final cut.

First was an enormous man, whose physique resembled that of a gorilla. A soldier, he had rock-hard strength. He had lost his right eye in battle, so had fitted a night vision device. This upgrade allowed him super-human sight.



He could handle heavy weapons, and was an invaluable ally. (The trap "Jill Sandwich" was designed for him; He was going to hold up the roof while the player looked for the switch to halt the trap) He was later replaced by Barry; not a major difference. The other character was a tall, dark man. He was not due to appear in the game immediately, but un-lockable once the player completed the game, with Chris, and Jill.

He was to provide some light relief, humour to counter-balance the horror. You could say he was the Eddy Murphy of Biohazard. We would have used this light relief at designated points, so not to exhaust the feeling of terror, but we didn't have time to design this. It was a stretch too far.

XMAS EVE Celebrating xmas in our office. I suggested that we take a break from work for the festivities, but my programmers were not happy with the idea, saying they did not have time to rest.

IF YOU DON'T FINISH YOUR WORK YOU'LL GET NOTHING
MERRY XMAS!
24/12 23 30 H
BEKAME I'LL KILL YOU!!
PROGRAMMERS

If we had printed on the front cover a warning the content was shocking, we could ensure those who didn't like such things, would not buy the game. This meant we could re-include the red blood. I'm still very grateful to the team who made this a reality.

A CHEST IN AN EXTRA DIMENSION

Initially the item chests were in a seperate 'dimension' i.e. they were not connected. We introduced the item chests in order to expand the player's game options. However, the response from our team of testers was quite poor. They did not like having to deviate from their chosen path to collect an item from a particular chest. Interestingly, there was a minority that did tell me they enjoyed this type of item chest.

Perhaps I was over-complicating matters, and jeopardizing the project, so I considered other methods, although personally I preferred the original system.

THE U.S VERSION

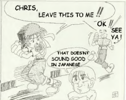
Biohazard was released in the U.S with the title Resident Evil. At that time, our North American division decided this to be a more appropriate title. I questioned its suitability, asking what it meant, and was told "the evil that lurks".

The U.S. version was much more challenging than the Japanese. Even the developers would die if they didn't take the necessary precautions. The reason why the game was so difficult was that the American division requested a tougher challenge. Americans can rent their video games; If the game was completed in a day or two then sales would plummet.

I was concerned whether players in the U.S would be enamored with such a tough setting. These amendments were as follows -

1. Disable the auto-targeting option.
2. The item chests should now be independent of each other.
3. The number of typewriter inks to record progress should be reduced.

I wondered if our American market really would appreciate this increased difficulty. I was convinced however that point 2 was unfair, and wanted to amend 1 and 3. Furthermore, the enemies were harder to defeat.


CHRIS,
LEAVE THIS TO ME !!
OK !!
SEE YA !
THAT DOESN'T SOUND GOOD IN JAPANESE

apanese vocals : Voices were recorded in Japanese as well as English, but it sounded awful so we binned it

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CHIEF OKAMOTO'S RAGE

When Biohazard was being tested, I received a call from my boss, Okamoto. He said -

"Don't you dare put Capcom's name to shit like this."

"What the hell is wrong with these controls ?"

"I cannot retrieve anything when shot"

"And there is no restriction on the number of times you can save"

"Why is there an item here ? Who dropped it ?"

I was furious, but when I considered his comments calmly, I realized that he was right. However, I was now so frustrated I lost all interest in seeing the game go on sale.

1. RESIDENT EVIL

PlayStation
CAPCOM

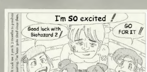
#1

2. SWEET HOME

#2

Capcom were not known for challenging games. Biohazard had obviously changed that. I was confident players would forgive this level of difficulty, due to the entertainment value. Maybe Okamoto did not appreciate my confidence. We used the little time we had left to improve the game, but we could not solve the problem with the controls.

Sweet Home was a horror game. I had seen the same titled film. Unlike Biohazard, it focused on the fear of ghosts. The eerie background music was perfect. The game achieved cult status. The American version of Biohazard was more graphic than the original. In the original movie no one is seen smoking, and there are no close-ups of mutilated bodies. By the way, the U.S version does not have the same music for the credits as the original.


I'm SO excited !
Good luck with Biohazard 2 !
GO FOR IT !!

Biohazard's Consequences : It took me 2 yrs & 3 months to produce. It was fun but also very exhausting. I've been quite tired since then.

Takeuchi "I don't agree ! More seriously, we must widen our audience."

Kamitani "Hmmm, it is not that easy to attract a larger audience, whilst not loosing sight of the game's essence."

Mikami "What about developing something scary, but easy to play ?"

Takeuchi "That would be ideal."

Sige "Shooting with Chris was very difficult."

Takeuchi "As a developer, it's quite easy to make a difficult game."

Kamitani "But you have to consider the players too."

Mikami "That's a good point; even as the director the challenge is the most important thing."

Kamitani "We had to have both in mind when we designed the game. Let's wait for the results !"

Mikami "Hey ! We are already out of space. Thank you all very much !"

Illustrations / Iraishi Tetsuya